

It's Smart To Be Gallery Wise!

THE WILLIAM ROCKHILL NELSON GALLERY OF ART

AND ATKINS MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS

N E W S F L A S H E S

January 1,

1 9 3 8

EXHIBITION OF CHINESE TOMB FIGURES: The Special Loan Exhibition for the month of January will be devoted to a series of Chinese Tomb Figures. These are the small clay replicas of soldiers and attendants, dancing girls and princesses, horses and camels, that were buried with the dead. The conception behind this custom was the belief that such clay figurines captured the spirit of the thing or person represented and that this spirit must serve the departed in the next world. Such small sculpture pieces have been recovered from the tombs of China in large numbers and a truly amazing variety of types. When they were first introduced into Europe and America only some twenty years ago, the tomb figures won immediate favor because of their high quality as small sculpture and definite human appeal. The little statuettes of human beings, generally represented with a lively expression or animated gesture, bring before us a fascinating and little known world of fierce warriors, graceful dancers, musicians, merchants in the high-peaked caps of Byzantium, grooms dressed in the costume of Central Asia - all the variety and colour of life in a cosmopolitan capitol many centuries ago.

The exhibition will include representative examples of tomb figures from the Han Dynasty (221 B.C.-206 A.D.) through the T'ang period (618-906 A.D.) and thus illustrate one branch of the Chinese potter's art for over a thousand years. The earliest figures exhibited date from about the first century of our era and are characterized by a wonderful simplicity of forms, a fine sense of balanced masses and archaic strength. Next in time, from the second to the fourth century, come the splendid horses' heads, quite Greek in their noble simplicity. For many visitors the greatest delight will be found in the large group of figures from the Wei period (386-543 A.D.) - these tall, elegant youths with their long oval faces lighted by an archaic smile that reminds us strangely of the gentle beauty of our own Middle Ages. The great prancing horses, dancing girls or palace ladies of the T'ang dynasty (618-906) are almost too well known to need description. This is the time when China led the universe in culture and material wealth. The capitol of Ch'ang An was the greatest and the most cosmopolitan city of the world. The art of tomb figures reached its most elaborate development in the large horses, guardians of the tomb, camels, servants - all beautifully modeled figures enlivened by bright painted colours or brilliant, lustrous glazes.

The permanent collection of the Gallery has been supplemented by generous loans from collectors in Kansas City. Important groups are contributed by Mr. and Mrs. Herbert V. Jones, Mr. and Mrs. J.C. Nichols, and Mr. and Mrs. James M. Kemper; valuable single examples are lent by Mr. and Mrs. F. P. Burnap, Mr. Allan Logan and Mr. and Mrs. Clyde Nichols, Jr.

The South Loan Gallery will contain a group of large pottery tiles which were once used to line the walls of tombs. They are all from the permanent collection and are shown now for the first time. These tiles are decorated with designs pressed into the clay while moist by means of dies or stamps. They range in period from about the third century B.C. to the second century A. D. The great artistic contribution of this period lay in the development of a wonderfully lively and rhythmic style of line drawing. The subjects are all symbolic or derived from folklore and are thus a most valuable comment on the beliefs of the time.

Since in recent years there has been a fast growing interest in Chinese wood-block prints, the Gallery takes this opportunity to show a selection from the quite comprehensive permanent collection. The North Loan gallery is hung with a group of polychrome block-prints from exceptionally fine editions of two famous books, The

Mustard Seed Garden and the Ten Bamboo Hall. Both of these books are manuals on the art of painting, the former was first printed in series from 1679 to 1818; the latter somewhat earlier, the first edition being printed in 1627. Strangely enough, although the Chinese understood the technique of coloured printing, they did not in any way employ it to the extent that it was exploited in Japan. In fact, these two books are almost unique in the history of Chinese art. This fact is all the more surprising in view of the great beauty and high technical skill shown in the illustrations of these two books. In the volume of flowers the printer has captured all the elusive, fragile colour and texture of the bloom, the pages of bamboo have the quality of fine graded ink washes, the pages of fantastic rocks seem to anticipate the conceptions of our modern abstraction and surrealist painters. The books were popular and many subsequent editions were produced, but early editions with their splendid colour and careful printing are rare in the extreme. However, the Gallery is happy to be able to present this unusual and little known phase of Chinese art by prints from the magnificent first and second editions.

MASTERPIECE OF THE MONTH: For January, the Masterpiece of the month will be a most important Chinese Stone Sculpture, dating from around 600 A.D., which has been recently acquired. This is perhaps one of the last monumental sculptures to have come out of war-torn China, and is being exhibited for the first time. It is the front of a small shrine or stupa, and has a central opening which at one time no doubt held an image of Buddha and attendants.

The design is carried out in exceptionally high relief, and the various dragons, guardian figures, floating angels and an extraordinary dancer in the upper central part are marked by an extreme exuberance and sense of motion which is heightened by the crispness of the carving. It could have been produced only by a vigorous people and in an age devoid of any sense of decline. It is a superb example of plastic art and takes an important place in the historical sequence of Chinese sculpture in the permanent collection.

WEDNESDAY EVENING LECTURES: On January 5th, the Wednesday Evening Lecture will be devoted to Chinese Tomb Figurines and will be given by Mr. Sickman. The Gallery is particularly rich in these fascinating replicas of court ladies, dancers, warriors, animals, and the central room of the January Loan Exhibition is devoted to them. It is a field in which the average collector can still find excellent examples and it is interesting to note that the permanent collection is augmented by a large group of Tomb Figures lent by local owners.

Pursuing the course of lectures on the History of Sculpture, that of Wednesday Evening, January 12th, will be devoted to the Romanesque Period and will be given by Mr. Gardner. This art, which followed the Dark Ages and was the first flowering of Christianity in sculptured monuments, is marked by a sincere and deep religious feeling and in a measure corresponds to the Gothic period as Greek archaic art does to the superb work of Phidias and his contemporaries of the Fifth Century B.C.

On January 19th, the characteristics of Gothic Sculpture will be discussed by Mr. Gardner. Closely associated with the soaring cathedrals of that age, it is the fruition of the experimentation of the Romanesque period and approaches a perfect combination of religious fervor, technical proficiency and sheer beauty.

The first of two lectures on Indian Sculpture will be given by Mr. Sickman on January 26th. Early examples of Indian Buddhist sculpture will be discussed, especially as contrasted with that of Greece and the Near East. The development of the Indian aesthetic canon will be traced up to the Gupta Period, which corresponds to the sixth century.

FRIENDS OF ART GIFTS: The permanent collection of the Gallery in the field of contemporary American art has been generously enriched by three gifts from the Society of the Friends of Art. The first of these, The Blue Jugger, by Walt Kuhn, gives us a representation by the dean of American painters. Long interested in the development of an understanding of modern art in America, Mr. Kuhn was instrumental in forming the great John Quinn and the

Lizzie Bliss Collections, and was one of the group who brought the Armory Show to New York in 1913 and gave America its first view of Cezanne, Picasso, Matisse and Duchamps. In his painting, which is strongly influenced by Greek archaic sculpture and Cezanne, he has always been interested in the theatre and the circus, perhaps because of the strong contrast of human emotions that it affords him. The Juggler, one of his latest figures, is a superb example of his ability to catch the significant gestures, the betraying traits of character of a performer. There is poised expectancy in the position of the hands, keenness in the eyes, and the neutral ground is a fine foil for the rich blue of the jersey and the pallor of the face.

The second gift is a Portrait Head by Alexander Brook, one of the most popular of America's younger artists. He has won many prizes and awards and is represented in almost every public collection in the United States. Eighteen months ago Brook stopped painting and made an extensive research with chemists into the properties of pigments and various techniques. This portrait is one of the first larger canvases which he has completed in a new technique which is a combination of tempera and oils. With it he has achieved a remarkable luminosity, which combined with Brook's sensitive and subtle colour sense, makes this one of his finest paintings to date. The mood is an original one; a young girl with fair hair which is partly bound in a white kerchief, is turned away from the spectator, yet one feels her personality and her charm most definitely. The background is a clear light blue and with the warm flesh tones and the dusty pink of the robe, makes a most beautiful colour harmony.

The third gift is a bronze sculpture, Andante Cantabile, by Wallace Rosenbauer, instructor at the Kansas City Art Institute. The slow graceful rhythm of the dance is beautifully expressed in the flowing lines of the figure, and the costume, hair and the gesture of the hands recall a movement from some master composition by the German Wigman. The sculpture was illustrated on the cover of the American Magazine of Art this past summer and a replica of the figure is now being shown in the International Exposition of the Dance at Rockefeller Center in New York City. This gift has the distinction of being the first piece of contemporary American sculpture to be included in the Gallery collection.

THE COOPERATIVE ARTISTS: For the month of January, Gallery 16 will be installed with a group of oils, watercolours and sculpture representing The Cooperative Artists, a recently formed association of Kansas City talent. This younger group, many of them associated with the Art Institute, has been exhibiting in Kansas City, Kansas, where they have a gallery at 710 Minnesota Avenue, and this is their first ensemble showing in this city. Each member will be represented by one work, and the following artists will exhibit: Lewis Anderson, Earl Baker, Henry Bollman, James Fitzgerald, Ivan Ganser, David Gilleylen, Mildred Hammond, Don Kincaid, Loraine Makinson, Duard Marshall, Joseph Meert, Margaret Mullin, Jack Nesbitt, Delmar Pacht, Wilber Phillips, James Roth, Troy Ruddick, and John Wisely.

ENGLISH LUSTRE WARE AND POTTERY FIGURINES: Gallery XVIII has been installed with a large and important group of English pottery, lent by Mr. and Mrs. Frank P. Burnap from their beautiful collection. Seen for the first time is a series of figurines by Ralph Wood, perhaps the largest single group in America of important examples of this potter's craft. It was under Wood that Staffordshire figures reached their zenith of technical skill and artistic quality. He always shows a definite understanding of the limitations of his medium and he made the most of the colours that were available, in harmonies of copper green, brownish manganese purple, gray, clear or orange yellows, and a rich, pure blue. His forms were always simplified and often are so imbued with traditional English humor that they recall types made familiar by Hogarth. On the other hand, some of them are obviously inspired by continental originals or adaptations from the antique.

A large group of purple lustre ware, which includes both marbled examples made by Wedgwood and mottled ware made by other potters, is also exhibited. Many of these pieces represent really a combination of gold lustre, which was used by Wedgwood as early as 1776, and the shades that run through pink and lavenders, obtained by the use of purple of cassius. One of the great successes in the use of

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these lustres by Wedgwood was the Pearl Ware Shell Dessert Service, of which several pieces are included in this exhibition. Thin washes of pink and yellow suggest the interior of the shells, and the colours glow with changes of hues when the light plays on them.

PRAIRIE PRINT MAKERS EXHIBITION: During the month of January, a group of prints circulated by the Prairie Print Makers will be shown in Gallery XV. While the headquarters of this organization are in Wichita, graphic artists from all over the country contribute to it. Such well-known names as Birger Sandzen, Arthur W. Hall, Levon West and C. A. Seward are included and prints in the mediums of etching, lithographs, aquatints and drypoint will be shown.

EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES: - MARIONETTE PLAY - On Sunday afternoon, January 30th, at three-thirty, the Advanced Marionette Class will present a play "The Fiesta of Guadalupe" in the Atkins Auditorium. The members of the class have made the puppets themselves and will also take the parts under the direction of Miss Mariska Pugsley. There is no admission charge and everyone interested in marionettes is cordially invited to attend.

C A L E N D A R

Wed., Jan. 5, 8:00 - Lecture - Chinese Tomb Figurines -
Mr. Sickman
Wed., Jan. 12, 11:00 - Friends of Art Study Class
Wed., " 12, 8:00 - Lecture - Romanesque Sculpture - Mr. Gardner
Thurs. " 13, 8:00 - Friends of Art Annual Meeting
Sun., " 16, 3:30 - Concert - Sigma Alpha Iota
Wed., " 19, 8:00 - Lecture - Gothic Sculpture - Mr. Gardner
Sun., " 23, 3:30 - Concert - Presented by Lois Black Hunt and
Edna Forsythe
Wed., " 26, 11:00 - Friends of Art Study Class
Wed., " 26, 8:00 - Lecture - Indian Sculpture - Mr. Sickman
Sun., " 30, 3:30 - Marionette Play - "The Fiesta of Guadalupe"

William Rockhill Nelson Gallery of Art
Kansas City, Missouri

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